

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4015

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PINT, VS

SUBJECT: GVN EXPELS ASAHI SHIMBUN BUREAU CHIEF

1. MR. BUI BAO TRUC, GVN PRESS SPOKESMAN, ANNOUNCED JULY 2 THAT THE SAIGON BUREAU CHIEF OF THE TOKYO NEWSPAPER ASAHI SHIMBUN, MR. KAZUNHISA IKAWA, HAD BEEN ASKED TO LEAVE VIETNAM WITHIN ONE WEEK BECAUSE OF A STORY ALLEGING THERE WERE BETWEEN 100,000 AND 200,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE COUNTRY. TRUC SAID THAT IKAWA HAD NOT APOLOGIZED AND HIS NEWSPAPER HAD NOT PRINTED A CORRECTION. THE SPOKESMAN ADDED THAT THE ASAHI SHIMBUN BUREAU IN SAIGON WOULD NOT BE CLOSED DOWN, BUT THE ASSIGNMENT OF A JAPANESE REPLACEMENT FOR MR. IKAWA WOULD DEPEND ON THE PAPER'S FUTURE ATTITUDE. (IKAWA IS THE ONLY JAPANESE MEMBER OF THE BUREAU. HE HAS THREE SUBSTANTIVE VIETNAMESE EMPLOYEES.)

2. THE PAPER'S TROUBLES BEGAN JUNE 21 WHEN GVN SPOKESMAN TRUC PUBLICLY THREATENED CLOSURE OF ITS SAIGON BUREAU AND EXPULSION OF THE BUREAU CHIEF BECAUSE OF A STORY IN TOKYO EDITIONS OF ASAHI MENTIONING 300,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS HELD BY THE GVN AND AN EDITORIAL IN THE SAME PAPER REFERRING TO 100,000 TO 200,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS. TRUC STATED THAT THE ASAHI HAD UNTIL JUNE 27 TO PRINT A CORRECTION AND PUBLICLY APOLOGIZE. GVN UMBRAGE WAS TAKEN AT BOTH THE USE OF THE TERM "POLITICAL PRISONERS," OF WHICH GVN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SAYS IT HOLDS NONE, AND THE FIGURES THEMSELVES.

3. IKAWA TOLD US BEFORE THE JULY 2 ANNOUNCEMENT THAT ASAHI WAS IN CONTACT WITH THE RVN EMBASSY IN TOKYO, AND THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR IN SAIGON ATTEMPTED TO INTERVENE WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. IKAWA ALSO SAID HE HAD HEARD THAT THE MATTER WAS DISCUSSED BETWEEN PRESIDENT THIEU AND COMMISSIONER GENERAL FOR INFORMATION NOANG DUC NHA, AND THAT THIEU WAS ANGRY AT THE WAY THE AFFAIR HAD BEEN HANDLED.

4. THE OFFENDING STORY, ACCORDING TO IKAWA, DID NOT ORIGINATE WITH THE LOCAL ASAHI BUREAU, BUT WAS GLEANED FROM JAPAN TIMES IN TOKYO. THE EDITORIAL, WHICH QUOTED SMALLER FIGURE (ALTHOUGH NO LESS OFFENSIVE TO GVN) WAS BASED, IKAWA SAYS, ON A FIGURE COMMONLY BELIEVED BY MANY JAPANESE TO BE A FAIR ESTIMATE. HE POINTS OUT (ACCURATELY) THAT PAPERS AND WIRE SERVICES HAVE FREQUENTLY QUOTED SIMILARY FIGURES. BECAUSE OF THIS, HE SAYS, ASAHI DOES NOT FEEL THAT IT CAN OR SHOULD APOLOGIZE. JAPAN TIMES HAS, HOWEVER, PRINTED AN APOLOGY WHICH HAS BEEN CARRIED BY REUTERS.

5. IKAWA HIMSELF IS DEFINITELY NOT HOSTILE TO THE GVN, NOT COULD ASAHI BE ACCUSED OF BEING CONSISTENTLY HOSTILE. THE PREVIOUS BUREAU CHIEF, SAKANAKA, WAS WELL ENOUGH CONNECTED TO BE ONE OF FEW CORRESPONDENTS WHO COULD CALL ON THE FOREIGN MINISTER WITHOUT AN APPOINTMENT.

6. THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE PRIOR TO TRUC'S ORIGINAL ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE ASAHI WAS IN ANY SPECIAL DISFAVOR. ASAHI CORRESPONDENTS IN PAST HAVE BEEN ASKED TO CORRECT STORIES GVN BELIEVED DEROGATORY, BUT SO HAVE MOST JMAJOR NEWS BUREAUS IN SAIGON. IKAWA DID STATE THAT ASAHI HAD BEEN ASKED PRIVATELY IN JANUARY TO APOLOGIZE FOR A STORY WHICH HE SAYS HAD RESULTED FROM AN EDITORIAL ERROR IN TOKYO, BUT THAT THE INCIDENT SEEMED NOT TO BE A MAJOR ONE IN GVN EYES.

7. COMMENT: WHY THE GVN CHOSE TO SINGLE OUT AND CONFRONT A MAJOR JAPANESE NEWS ORGANIZATION AT A TIME OF FAIRLY ROSY DETENTE WITH THE SAIGON PRESS CORPS ELUDES WESTERN LOGIC. CERTAINLY LITTLE PRESITGE ACCRUES TO GVN. UNDOUBTEDLY A POINT WAS BEING MADE, BUT WHETHER FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE WESTERN PRESS, THE VIETNAMESE PRESS, THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT, OR, LEAST LIKELY, ASAHI ITSELF, MAY NEVER BE KNOWN.

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